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# Victorian Women and Their Working Roles

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*Victorian Women and Their Working Roles*

by

Kara L. Barrett

An Abstract of a Thesis  
in  
English

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Master of Arts

May 2013

State University of New York  
College at Buffalo  
Department of English

### Abstract

Women during the Victorian Era did not have many rights. They were viewed as only supposed to be housewives and mothers to their children. The women during this era were only viewed as people that should only concern themselves with keeping a successful household. However, during this time women were forced into working positions outside of the household.

Women that were forced into working situations outside of their households were viewed negatively by society. Many women needed to have an income to support their families because the men in the household were not making enough money to survive. When the women entered the work places they were not made to feel welcome and were often harassed. These women workers therefore were not welcome in the work place (outside of the household) or in society.

The texts *Helen Fleetwood*, *Goblin Market*, *North and South*, *Shirley* and *Sybil* all have women in different working roles during this era. All of these texts strive to show that working women of all classes and working roles are viewed and treated poorly by Victorian society as a whole. However, the society is not giving the women any other option to advance or fix the situation that they are in. These texts show the unsafe conditions these working women were faced with and the treatments of them from society as a whole.

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## Women Workers through the Classes

Women throughout the Victorian Era were treated as secondary citizens to men in society. Women were very restricted within their classes and were even more restricted in the work place. Working-class women held many positions, but they were not paid the same wages as their male co-workers (even if their production numbers were higher and their product was of better quality). Middle and upper class life was different from the working class life. The women of these upper classes had different job options and could even be found being idle women. The women of *Shirley*, *Helen Fleetwood*, *North and South*, *Goblin Market* and *Sybil* all fell under different working roles within the Victorian Era. However, all of these women have issues within society that restrict them from making progress and advancing their lives (or their families). The roles these women filled were some of the most common roles that women could be found working during this era. The factory girl, the idle woman, the future nun or convent girl, and even the prostitute were all very different roles (and even different classes for some of the women) however; all these roles were dictated to them and for them by men. The women were never in charge of their own fate within the working roles because of the fact that they were women.

Society during this era made it impossible for women to make any advancement. “Whatever their social rank, in the eyes of the law women were second-class citizens” (Gallagher, 57). The law which society produced and the expectations as whole, discouraged women in the labor field at all. Victorians believed that a woman’s proper and only place was to be within a household environment. The women were expected to marry, have children, and keep a nice household. Those were the only acceptable roles for women during that era. Women that were involved in the work place were viewed as being damaged and somehow less worthy

of a good life and reputation than those women who were spared from the often brutal working conditions and hours that the women faced. They were worked to death not only because they were subjected to the lower wages and less profitable jobs, but because once women entered into the working-class, there was no way to advance out of it because society will always view the working women as below them.

So the women within the novels struggled daily to make it through the day without being harassed or taunted by men. Women because they were second-class to men were open to more crimes against them without any consequence to the male that is committing the crime. This made rapes, sexual harassment in the workplace, sexual threats while going to and from work, and even physical threats common to women workers. So although the women in the texts come from different classes and hold different working roles, they all face the same issue: they are all working women. And in this era working women did not have a fair chance in society. This thesis will examine how the lives of women workers were dictated through their class and the lack of options they had through the work of several women authors. These texts are a mirror of the life of women during this era. The women authors of these texts offer a female point of view of these situations, but still allow society and the surrounding characters to treat the female characters just as they would in every day Victorian life.

## Chapter One:

### Women Factory Workers

During the Victorian era females did not have a lot of freedom and when it came to their job choices the situation was even worse. The critic Wanda Fraiken Neff showed several issues within the field of women workers. “Not only were working women regarded as problem. All women were a problem” (Neff, 11). This statement shows the common belief at the time and makes the situation for all working women a dismal one. “Women workers did not harmonize with the philosophy of the Victorians, their definition of the home. Women ought to marry. There ought to be husbands for them. Women were potential mothers” (Neff, 14). Women were often placed into roles and situations that were not considered suitable for women during this time period. Mill workers, prostitutes and even unwed motherhood concerns were all a part of the growing issues with women workers. Patricia Johnson also critiqued women workers and their conditions. She stated that “working- class women fueled the Industrial Revolution, making up as much as 60 percent to 80 percent of the workforce in light industries such as cotton manufacturing (Johnson, 1). Women that had jobs outside of the home made them less likely to marry leaving them with no choice but to stay in the undesirable situation that has made them undesirable. “Classing women and children together as helpless creatures needing the protection of strong men, they were indignant at the knowledge that women had to support themselves, that they suffered degrading wrongs as working women” (Neff, 14). Several authors such as Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna and Elizabeth Gaskell at the time tried to address the issues and began to tie women workers with children workers in order to try to get some action to be taken by Parliament. However, although the passing of these bills could be viewed as positive, many of these laws ended up limiting the amount of time and money women could potentially earn by



limiting their hours of work. There are several examples of the poor conditions of the work place environment, the treatment of the employees, and the just out right neglect that was inflicted upon the women during the Victorian time period in England. Women were left with no choice but to take a chance and hope for the best in their situations.

*Helen Fleetwood* by Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna (1841) is an example of a text that shows the disregard to females in the factories and to even their grandmother who is brushed aside because of not only her class, but because she was a female on top of it. The family within the novel included several children that were cared for their grandmother. Richard was the grandson who was the male figure in the novel for the family even though he was also young himself. James and Helen were also members of this family and were cared for by the grandmother. The family lived on the countryside and was having a very fulfilling and peaceful existence, until the grandmother was tricked into thinking that moving the family into the factory town would be what was best for the family. So from the very beginning Tonna was showing the total disregard of the grandmother and family because they were just seen as a form of labor from the very beginning of the novel. When the family was forced from their life in the countryside by a shady businessman, the family was forced into a factory town and all the females of the family were forced into work to allow the family to survive (even though they lived without many comforts and went hungry still with every female member of the family contributing). The constant movement of the machinery made working in the factories very dangerous for all the women workers.

The man at the wheel is the spinner, and when the frame comes up to the room he has to set his hand against it and push it back, which is pretty hard work. The joining, or piecing is easy enough when you get used to it... You see, bits of

cotton wool will stick to the thread, and they mustn't go on the reels; so there is a little girl huddled up under the frame and she snatches off all the loose wool, and throws it down so fast and when the machine runs back, if the little scavenger did not bob and duck, and get very low she would have a fine knock on the head (Tonna, 86).

So the female worker must be bending down, running, while watching the cotton and the machine parts all at the same time. "There is a very dangerous thing, called an upright shaft in that box. It keeps constantly in rapid motion, and when left exposed, very dreadful injury is inflicted, and often instant death to the poor worker caught in passing it" (Tonna, 266). Many of the mill workers throughout the book were injured and viewed as being unhealthy in appearances by Richard throughout his visits to the mills from the countryside. Women were often employed at these mills however because they were viewed as being good at these jobs. "They were often better suited to certain work than men, especially to weaving, where a girl of eighteen was indispensable at the power-loom, a quick skillful worker" (Neff, 31). The women workers were still paid considerably less money than the men and often could not survive on their wages. The men of the household often would take the women's wages from them and then would allow the women to use a certain amount of the money to live on. Angela John focused on the division of labor and found that women were considered less skilled and were limited on the work they produced. "But the evidence that exists about the division of labour within working- class families suggests that women's labour was regarded as less valuable than that of men. Most women who knitted at home produced less each week than their male counterparts" (John, 55). This was the situation for many women workers and the women in Tonna's novel were no exception. "The daughter of Tom South in the story was anxious to work overtime because all of

her regular wages went to her father and she only had the overtime to pay for herself. This was a common situation among factory families” (Neff, 51). The physical demands of the job were tiring during normal working hours. Many characters in the novel considered their normal amount of hours a sentence to death let alone the idea of working extra hours for nice dresses like Tom South’s daughter loved to purchase to make herself appear to be more presentable than just a mill worker. Her wish to make herself desirable to someone cost her in the end because she ended up working herself to death for the dresses that she thought would help her fulfill her desires. Women mill workers were considered undesirable because of the physical conditions, but they were more adequate workers for many of the roles than then men were. Women were in a situation where they needed to earn money, but were damned for doing so.

The mill conditions were discussed throughout *Helen Fleetwood* although the children of the family spent much of the time hiding the terrible situation inside the mills from their grandmother (because God is who they should have looked to for support and guidance) and Richard (because they did not want to worry him because he is off in the country still living the peaceful life that they were convinced and forced to leave behind at the promise of jobs and a decent way of life).

Excluded from the free air, and almost from the pure light of day; shut up in an atmosphere polluted by clouds of fetid breath, and all the sickening exhalations of a crowded human mass, whose unwashed, overworked bodies were also in many cases diseased, and by the suffocating dust that rose on every side; relaxed by an intensity of artificial heat which their constitutions were never framed to encounter in the temperate clime where God had placed them; doubly fevered, doubly debilitated, by excessive toil, not measured by human capacity to sustain

it, but by the power of machinery obeying an inexhaustible impetus; badly clothed, wretchedly fed, and exposed moreover to fasts of unnatural length even from that miserable fare; who can marvel if, under such a system, the robust adult speedily acquires a sickly habit of body, and a morbid state of feeling, leading at once to most awful perversion of mind and corruption of morals (Tonna, 126).

The women that were in these poor working conditions were malnourished and still forced to work just as hard. The conditions of these factories added to the poor health of the women workers.

Within the novel *North and South* by Elizabeth Gaskell (1854) there is a character named Bessy Higgins that is unable to work and is on death's door because of the factory conditions she was forced to work in. Even after being home and away from the factory the scenes and memories still threatened her existence.

'I wish father would not speak as he does. He means well, as I telled yo' yesterday, and tell yo' again and again. But yo' see, though I don't believe him a bit by day, yet by night — when I'm in a fever, half-asleep and half-awake — it comes back upon me — oh! so bad! And I think, if this should be th' end of all, and if all I've been born for is just to work my heart and my life away, and to sicken i' this dree place, wi' them mill-noises in my ears for ever, until I could scream out for them to stop, and let me have a little piece o' quiet — and wi' the fluff filling my lungs, until I thirst to death for one long deep breath o' the clear air yo' speak on — and my mother gone, and I never able to tell her again how I loved her, and o' all my troubles (Gaskell, 101-102).

Bessy Higgins still saw and heard the factory noises and even would hallucinate about the damaging conditions. She described the filling of her lungs with the “fluff” and was still traumatized at the conditions that she was forced to work in. Bessy was forced to work in conditions that led her to death in order to support her family. Bessy Higgins was in a situation similar to Tom South’s daughter and in the end both girls would end up sick and then die. The mill workers were left without any fresh air, room to move around for comfort purposes, time to sit down (break time) with the exception of meal time (when often people did not have meals because they could not afford to eat any additional times during the day) and the temperature of the air was also a concern.

Concerning the health of mill women there was great divergence of opinion. One group contended that excessive labour where the temperature ranged from 84 to 90 degrees in the cotton-spinning department, and to 120 to 140 degrees in the linen mills, where the air was vitiated by the fluff in the carding- room and dust in the picking- room of cotton mills, and the workers wet to the waist, in the wet-spinning process of flax, stood in bare feet on the wet floor in a steamy atmosphere was a menace to health. Poor ventilation was common (Neff, 37).

The air the women would breathe was hot, humid and filled with excess particles of the material that was being milled. The women were forced to breathe and even eat the particles as shown in one scene in *Helen Fleetwood* when Richard is touring the mill where he was trying to move his family because he believed that the conditions would be better for them. Richard was only fighting a losing battle because no conditions were healthy within the mills.

In these rooms the girls with difficulty squatted themselves in small parties between the rows of frames, which ran quite across them. The same aspect of

exhaustion, the same vacancy, and lack of youthful animation prevailed. Hollow cheeks, heavy eyes, narrow chests and stooping shoulders, met the inquiring gaze at every turn. Discontent, not noisy or active, but gloomy and silent, seemed impressed on all, together with a sort of helpless resignation, to what they knew must be (Tonna, 269).

The females that were working in these conditions were at the point of physical and mental exhaustion. They were running on survival mode knowing that if they were to under produce or try to remove their mind from the task at hand they could end up dead. After the exhaustion and the disgusting conditions in the mills, women were then expected to arrive home and begin to build comfortable homes that were neat and tidy.

Women workers were still held to the same expectations that other women during this time were held. On top of the household values that they were held to they were expected to become mothers and raise children and this was becoming a large issue during the time period.

All women were regarded in the first half of the nineteenth century solely as potential mothers. The worker with her own earnings was, accordingly, an affront against nature and the protective instincts of man. That the family was affected by the labor of girls and women in the mills was a consideration of the roused general concern. The question of the health of human beings who were entrusted with the responsibility of the next generation, the conflict of factory work and long hours with domestic life and with a mothers care of her home and her children, the moral and spiritual degradation which might result from the employment of females outside their homes (Neff, 37).

So although it was obvious to many that women during this time often had no choice but to work in the mills, the public (that was not involved in the mill work) felt that these women had no business involving themselves in such labor. Many women during this time had to work in order to even sustain the household that they were so supposed to manage and maintain. Women were viewed as ideally at home tending to the children and making sure the children had a proper upbringing and education. Women during this time did account for a large portion of the workforce, but still the view was never changed on this topic because of the importance of motherhood to the people of the Victorian Era.

But the most bitter battle of diverse opinion raged around the subject of the effects of factory labour upon mothers. The group hostile to factory work for women quoted doctors who believed the narrow pelvises of women employed in the mills from childhood made childbirth difficult and dangerous. The practice of allowing pregnant women to remain at work was vigorously attacked. Night work was considered especially dangerous for them. Frequent miscarriages, varicose veins, ulcers on the legs followed the overwork of pregnant women. The factory girls were not fit physically for motherhood was frequently stated. Martha, a factory girl before her marriage to Hudson, the reformer in *Helen Fleetwood*, died when her first child was born. The opposing side made no contention for health in all this phase on the subject (Neff, 40).

The physical burden on the female body was displayed multiple times throughout the novel of *Helen Fleetwood*. The fact of the matter is that women were given more cramped conditions because of their smaller frames than men and often because the women workers were considered better workers because of their product output and their cheaper wages. Women worked longer

and still made less money doing the same job as a male employee. It wasn't until 1850 when the law forced mill owners to pay women workers the same wages as men (when their quantity and quality of work was equal to a man's output). However, by then there was no helping those who had already been subjected to the daily life of mill work. Women were forced to work longer and harder to earn their way, but then were mistreated or even ended up dead due to miscarriages and pregnancy issues. There was also the public scrutiny that came along with the work and the treatment of the women verbally in the mills.

The women in the mills were not only harassed outside of the mill but within the mill as well and there were no means of controlling this or even contacting the employer to help them in the situation. The grandmother and guardian in *Helen Fleetwood* was faced with this problem and came up with very few results and even could have made the situation worse for the family members that were forced into the mills on a daily basis. Their family was at a disadvantage due to their country background and not being exposed from early ages to the cruelty and even raunchiness of the mill environment. "The first part of the information of course excited much laughter, the latter no less indignation; and poor Helen found herself at once marked out for the contempt and dislike of the people around her" (Tonna, 88). Helen in this situation was faced with the fact that the people in the factory community were not impressed with her religious beliefs and these mill people were not going to be her friends. The education they received on religion and their virtues were very rare in mill work because the people in the mill towns did not have the time or the energy after their long work days to be educated. The conditions within the mill were very dismal and so were the people's attitudes. Their treatment of female factory workers was both intimidating and derogatory. " But their threats kept seven women from work, and crowds of seven or eight thousand, throwing stones and shouting after the insistent women,



forced one of the partners to accompany them to work and to give them temporary living-quarters within the walls of the mill” (Neff, 30). The women were unable to walk safely from home into work because the men in the town would make their walk very difficult with verbal and even physical threats. The women were being forced into a work situation that was not pleasurable and then being treated brutally along the way. The women were leaving their household and child raising duties in order to work in a mill which was also viewed by the general public as improper and neglectful.

The public belief was also that many women were exposed to things that were considered damaging to a female to encounter and hear.

Mr. Z, I know, has daughters growing up: would he send them among us for an hour every day? Not he. He knows too well that their health would be destroyed by staying so long in the heat, the steam, the stench and the dust of rooms where we are pent up from early morning to late night; and he knows that they would never again be let into respectable society if they were supposed to hear the vile, filthy talk that his poor labourers use, and the men he sets over them encourage; and which he never dreams of checking, either by his own presence, or by setting any moral, not to say religious person, to watch them (Tonna, 120).

This situation within the novel was a common scene during the time. The mill owners would never allow their daughters or even sons to enter a mill due to the conditions present there. The female workers both young and old that were in the mills did not have the luxury of being able to decide to not go to work. They worked because they needed an income in order to survive. Then after all the work and effort in the mills, society would no longer view them as being women worthy of a respectable position. Women that worked in the mills were viewed as being tainted

and unable to move up to a more “respectable” position in the workforce or in society in general. The mill owners knew what was occurring daily within the walls of their mills and would not allow their daughters in, but were unwilling to do anything to change the terrible situations that were occurring within them. The mill owners instead would dismiss any complaints or concerns raised because there were no true consequences for them. Within this novel it is shown through trials and the dismissal of the grandmother’s concerns to several people in charge that she was just wasting their time and causing disruption in their households and daily routines. The grandmother was held powerless to change any of the situations throughout the mills and there was no hope in sight of the situation changing. The only thing that would allow the situation to change for the mill working females was death. Many workers by the time they reached this point had made the decision that death was better to deal with than the brutal conditions faced daily within the mills. “Tonna’s novel ends in failure with Helen dead and the factory system intact, but its depiction of a girl’s resistance to workplace harassment is still a victory. Helen defies the attacks made on her and asserts the right to her own integrity” (Johnson, 56). Although Helen suffered the same ending as many females, she did so while keeping her religious stance and still kept her faith. Helen did not allow the system to break her down and change her to their way of life.

This situation continued to occur throughout mill areas during this time period. The women in these situations were left to their own devices and were unable to change their situations no matter how valiant of an effort they put forward. These women were even considered fortunate to have found work in some of the other people’s eyes that are among the same financial and social class. People were rejected due to health issues and not having enough strength left to continue working or to gain admittance into the mills. So the women workers

were often made to just feel fortunate to have a position that would surely lead to an early death and an existence that was stagnant and unchanging. Other women during this time may not have been as “fortunate” to have found employment within a mill. What was left for the women to do after being forced into a position that was ultimately the death of them physically and socially? Women were left with no choice but to accept their positions and hope that they can make enough to feed their children and keep themselves in a position of having shelter. They were bound to their positions by a society that would punish them no matter what their decision was. This working situation within the mills allowed for other working situations such as prostitution to occur. The lack of decent wages forced women to find a second way to earn their income and needless to say the Victorian society did not view prostitution as an acceptable position to hold.

## Chapter Two

### Prostitution: Crime or Career?

Women during the Victorian Era were forced into conditions besides mill work that were considered unacceptable to the higher classes of society and even some women among the lower classes that viewed prostitutes as a threat to their marriage or household. As shown in *Helen Fleetwood* (1841) and *North and South* (1855), mill work was a job that forced women into extreme conditions that often led to death. Prostitution during this time was another avenue of work into which women were forced. This is seen within the poem *Goblin Market* (1862) by Christina Rossetti. With a lack of working options and rights, women were often left with no other choice but this position.

*Goblin Market* is a poem that crosses many different audience boundaries, but the two most popular are as a child's fairy tale and adult erotica. "It is important to note that the poem's first known public audience was not children, but adults" (Kooistra, 183). Many people throughout the years have rewritten and adapted *Goblin Market* to fit their audience which Rossetti herself aided within her form of the poem. "Although it is impossible to know for certain at this later date, it seems likely that Rossetti deliberately used the fairy-tale form-suitable for oral readings and hence accessible to wider audiences" (Kooistra, 183). This allowed the poem to move from an erotic text to a text that was suitable for an audience of children. In order for it to be suitable for children (instead of adults) many passages were omitted and rewritten to suit the younger audience. The deletion of large portions of the poem shows that it was not necessarily meant for children, but instead a more mature adult audience. The images of "explicit portrayal of nudity and sexuality" allow it to be read as something that includes

“homosexual gang rape, lesbian love” and even prostitution (Kooistra, 194). Rossetti within the poem shows prostitution as a situation that not only the sisters faced, but as one that all of Victorian society faced as well.

Prostitution and women’s issues in general were also a problem that John Stuart Mill brings up in *The Subjection of Women*; he saw the fact that women were not given a right to own property (which in this case could be used as a bartering or money making tool) as oppression.

This particular injustice and oppression to women, which is, to common apprehensions, more obvious than all the rest, admits a remedy without interfering with any other mischiefs: and there can be little doubt that it will be one of the earliest remedied. Already, in many of the new and several of the old States of the American Confederation, provisions have been inserted and even written in the Constitutions. Securing to women equality of rights in this respect: and thereby improving materially the position, in the marriage relation of those women at least who have property, by leaving them one instrument of power which they have not signed away; and preventing also the scandalous abuse of the marriage institution, which is perpetrated when a man entraps a girl into marrying him without a settlement, for the sole purpose of getting possession of her money (Mill, 24).

Prostitution during the Victorian Era allowed women to barter within the market place without influence of men (fathers) who would often take their earnings and goods. Laura in *Goblin Market* did not have any money to barter with, so Laura decided to use a part of her body in order to purchase the fruit that the goblins were tempting her with.

But sweet-tooth Laura spoke in haste;

Good folk, I have no coin;  
  
To take were to purloin  
  
'I have no copper in my purse,  
  
I have no silver either,  
  
And all my gold is on the furze  
  
That shakes in the windy weather  
  
Above the rusty heather.'  
  
'You have much gold upon your head'  
  
They answered all together:  
  
'Buy from us with a golden curl'  
  
She clipped a precious golden lock,  
  
She dropped a tear more rare than a pearl,  
  
Then sucked their fruit globes fair or red (Rossetti, 4).

The quotation from Rossetti shows the exchanging of her body physically within the market place. The woman is attempting to purchase the tempting fruit that she and her sister were supposed to stay away from because she was a female she had no monetary means of making this happen. The goblins within the poem are all of the male sex and are deformed in some way. "When Laura first observed them, she described them to Lizzie as "little men", but upon closer examination they "appear to be as bestial as they are human" (Mayberry, 96).

One had a cat's face,

One whisked a tail,

One tramped at a rat's pace.

One crawled like a snail,

One like a wombat prowled obtuse and furry,

One like a ratel tumbled hurry skurry (Rossetti, 10).

Lizzie and Laura were told not to eat the goblin's fruit because it is forbidden and will only bring them trouble. The physical appearance of the goblins showed how society viewed the people involved with prostitution. The idea that they were beast-like gives the impression that they were no longer considered human and could not be a part of the normal society anymore. So Laura and Lizzie both knew of the danger. Laura, however, gave in because she was unable to handle the temptation any further. Rossetti showed what many women prostitutes were faced with. Women prostitutes were given the challenging decision to sell their body or not have the goods they needed to survive. So Laura like many women chose to use their body to get the fruit that she so desperately craved. The women were forced into a world that was dominated by men, had awful working conditions, low wages and these were the main reasons prostitution was being turned to more and more. "The specter of the hungry urban working women being forced to take to the streets to supplement the meager wages paid in many shops and trades appalled many 19<sup>th</sup> century people" (Offen, 418). The women had nothing to contribute or bargain with within the world of consumerism which is why the goblins were telling the women to barter with a piece of Laura's precious golden hair. The goblins were also the characters who suggested that

type of exchange in place of a monetary one for the fruit. The male goblins were more than willing to accept her physical sacrifice for their goods.

Prostitutes and mill workers shared a bond of physical sacrifices from the jobs that they were working. Both of these jobs forced women to use their bodies in the most extreme fashions. Women in the mills were working themselves to death (literally) and still were not making enough money to support their families. Prostitutes during this time were forced to use their body like it was a piece of woven material from a factory loom. This was their product and they needed to sell it in order to provide for themselves and even at times a family. This often led to disease and death just as it did for mill workers. “There have not been less than 2,700 cases of prostitution arising from this cause” that the two largest London hospitals could trace back to prostitution (Mayhew, 4).

Women mill workers and prostitutes were viewed very similarly. Women mill workers and prostitutes were viewed as issues to society and unhealthy individuals. In both situations women in these roles were incapable of being saved and were also unable to work in any position above mill work or prostitution. “ In an unreflective mood I should be inclined to say that prostitutes, taken collectively, were most abandoned, reckless and wicked” (Mayhew, 91). The view that higher society had of prostitutes showed that these women were labeled and that redemption was not within reach for them. Both of these positions were viewed as poisoning to the women, making them unfit for a job that would maybe allow them to improve their situation. Prostitutes were often arrested (an average of 2,500) per year in order to keep the streets “clean” and free of these “fallen” and “wicked” women. Often times the police would find that these prostitutes were doing this line of work because their first job wasn’t providing enough income. “Prostitution was ordinarily a part time, temporary employment of young women that offered a



supplement to the low pay of other women's work, a buffer against recurrent unemployment, and an escape from the close supervision of factory work or domestic service" (Murray, 392). So many prostitutes were in the field because their initial job's income was not high enough for the women to live off of which is what the characters of *Helen Fleetwood* were struggling with. "Remunerative employment would empty half the streets; pay women, for the same work the same wages that men receive; let sex be no disqualification; let women be trained to labor, and educated for self- support; then the greatest of all remedies will be applied to the cure of prostitution and women will cease to sell their bodies when they are able to sell their labor" (Murray, 389). If society trained and accepted women into the work force for the same jobs and income as the men were receiving, then many people believed that the issue of prostitution would have greatly decreased. Women were being forced into a situation that society did not accept, however this role was created by the working situation that society created for women.

At the end of *Goblin Market* Christina Rossetti gives both Lizzie and Laura happy endings with children and a solid household, but no men are involved or were ever mentioned. John Stuart Mill's text *The Subjection of Women* showed that women, even with property, were really left with nothing to trade or make a living outside the household with because the men end up taking ownership of their wives' property. So women were forced to sign over everything they owned to their husbands and were left with no type of security if the men decided to leave or divorce them. The idea of prostitution was the one thing the women were left to work with after the men took everything they wanted and felt that they were entitled to.

Prostitution was a very large issue during the Victorian era and was considered devastating to their society. The women that were involved in this profession were viewed as a disgraced because the Victorians had different expectations of women.

In cold climates, as in hot climates, we have shown that the passions are the main agents in producing the class of women that we have under consideration, but in temperate zones the animal instinct is less difficult to bridle and seldom leads the female to abandon herself to the other sex. It is a vulgar error, and a popular delusion, that the life of a prostitute is as revolting to herself, as it appears to the moralist sternly laminating over the condition of the fallen (Hemyng, 4).

This section goes on to discuss how a woman could still find true love and her love was stronger because of her previous situation, this almost justified for the women that this was an acceptable thing for women to do. However, women that were in that situation were viewed as “fallen women” because they were prostitutes and sexually involved with men outside of marriage, they were not viewed in a favorable way. It was determined that women were still capable of a successful marriage and of love, but higher society did not allow women the chance to move beyond their current role. “Fallen women” were kept in their current position and were no longer capable of anything beyond what actions landed them in that position.

The religious aspect of *Goblin Market* showed that religion during this time period was very important. Religion allowed the people to believe that they will have a better life in heaven and move on from the dismal situations they lived in. In *Helen Fleetwood* the grandmother focused on religion as a way to get the children under control and through their daily lives. They were the only family in the mill and society that had any sense of religion and even prayed on a daily basis before going off to bed. The children in *Helen Fleetwood* were ridiculed for their religious beliefs and were often told by their grandmother to tell God their problems and that he would give them strength to move through their day fearlessly (this however was made very

difficult with the working conditions of the mill). However, religion within Rossetti was used to show the idea of the “fallen woman”.

Many religious issues were raised within the novel *Helen Fleetwood*. The grandmother and family members were looked down upon for having any religious beliefs. Mrs. Wright (the grandmother’s daughter) even poked at her way of life. “I’d rather have it so than make my house the gloomy place you would wish it to be- filled with long faces, and dismal voices, drawling out melancholy psalms, and texts, and prayers all day long” (Tonna, 82-83). Mrs. Wright showed the common view of mill families and workers, why waste the time on something that is not having a direct impact on the income of the household. For women workers, religion was not really given much value because they were viewed by society as “fallen” and at that point it was already too late to make any real changes within their lives. The only thing that women could hope for was forgiveness from God for the acts that they had committed. In *Goblin Market* Christina Rossetti made the story of Adam and Eve echo through the whole poem.

Laura started from her chair,

Flung her arms up in the air,

Clutched her hair:

“Lizzie, Lizzie, have you tasted

For my sake the fruit forbidden?

Must your light like mine be hidden,

Your young life like mine be wasted,

Undone in mine undoing,

And ruined in my ruin (Rossetti, 14).

The goblins were tempting like the serpent and Lizzie and Laura almost always resisted them, but in this situation the women in the poem were tempted and one could not resist the goblins' temptation. So when Laura physically bartered for the fruit she became a part of the fallen. Her sister was forced to make a decision as many families had to during this time period when a family member "fell" into sin. The choice to forgive and help or to outcast and keep the fallen women down was a large issue in the society during that time. The labeling of women as "fallen" was society's way of separating them from their classes and keeping them set aside from the rest of women. In *Goblin Market* the choice and decision made by Lizzie to save her sister was different from the one that society made about women workers.

Thirsty, cankered, goblin- ridden?"

She clung about her sister,

Kissed and kissed and kissed her:

Tears once again

Refreshed her shrunken eyes,

Dropping like rain

After long sultry drouth;

Shaking with aguish fear, and pain,

She kissed and kissed her with a hungry mouth (Rossetti, 14).

This was the act of redemption that was not only needed for the women present in the poem, but for women in society as a whole. The religious aspect was a very big part of what women during this time needed to have happen. Laura and Lizzie in the poem had a bond as sisters (women) that were stronger than the goblins, temptation, sin and even what society might begin to think of the sisters. This poem shows the power of women to be saved and forgiven for their digressions within society by other women.

Women were very protective of their class status during this time period and were very careful to never lose their class ranking in situations of money and power. The women in charge with these advantages were the ones that could have aided and assisted the working women during this time period, however these women were considered threatening and unfit to have any advancement. So the higher class women continued to punish, prosecute and keep down the other classes of women to make sure their established places of wealth and power were not risked or infiltrated in any way.

Far from being a deviant figure, the prostitute in many ways was highly representative of women in nineteenth-century England, both in her own experiences and in her public situation. The obviously dehumanizing quality of the prostitutes work and her alienation from her own body and from her capacity for pleasure, differ only in degree from the general situation of women whose sexual and emotional lives were similarly inhibited and defined by their economic dependence on men (Murray, 390-391).

It was women workers who were the one's suffering at the end of the day so the other women did not feel obligated to make any changes that would aide a part of the society that they viewed as dangerous to Victorian principles and family life. So the issues of women workers could have been solved (at least partially) by other women, however the women of higher classes were not looking to share their lifestyle with these problematic "others" even if it meant more independence from being dependent on men. Women workers were dependent on men for a lot of things including income however women that did not have jobs (idle women) were still forced into this same dependency. Women in all positions in Victorian society were forced into this secondary role.

### Chapter Three

#### *Shirley*: Women with too much spare time?

*Shirley* (1849) by Charlotte Bronte shows very interesting female characters. These characters although female, were in different situations due to their class than Lizzie, Laura and the women within *Helen Fleetwood*. The women within *Shirley* had a decent amount of money and power due to who their families were. They had the ability to do charity work and donate money to those workers in their communities who lost money when the introduction of machinery in the mills forced the workers out of a job. These women with so much extra time on their hands were able to concentrate on education and even on politics.

The women of the middle class were often referred to as idle women. This title was something that women could not be comfortable with because it made them look unprepared to move on to different stages of life.

The management of large households, including the supervision of many servants and the care, education and guidance of numerous children, required knowledge and labour and skill, but women were not being trained for this. The frivolous education bestowed upon girls merely prepared them to get married, not to be married. And how degrading it was for girls to have to marry in order to gain a respectable livelihood and a recognized status in society, and degrading for men as well, when it was not easy to distinguish a genuine preference in a woman amidst the general scramble for husbands. Idleness was not ladylike but unwomanly, an evil and a snare. Work was a positive good, necessary for women

as for men to maintain them in both physical and mental health, for nothing was so depressing and so painful as to feel that one is in the world of no use. Work outside the home was also an excellent preparation for marriage, a means of education, promoting increased stability, independence, self-reliance, and any sort of steady womanly work would be a better preparation for married life than mere dull vacancy (Holcombe, 8).

The idea of women not having any type of preparation from having a job was unacceptable, but when some women did work in different classes they were viewed as unsuitable for marriage. There were only certain working roles that were suitable for women during this time and often they were not educationally prepared for these roles.

Middle-class working women, once relegated to the field of 'governessing' were still restricted to certain occupations only, the traditionally feminine professions of teaching and nursing and a few new fields, such as shop and clerical work and the lower reaches of the civil service, where their cheapness compared with men encouraged their increasing employment (Holcombe, 198).

There was a need to have women out and working within society, but only in those roles that were deemed suitable for women to be in. The main thing that Victorian people were concerned with was the idea of a proper household. Women could not and would not (in the upper classes) be placed within roles that would cause this much-needed household to fail or suffer in any way. Women of course would be placed in these working positions in order to gain knowledge on how to run a household and gain experience for marriage. The women that held



successful positions seemed to be more desirable than those that didn't to men who were also forced into the marriage and household structure of time.

One of the major roles working for women was governessing. This role allowed women to be within a household and become familiar with educating children and family life. Educating the children was a major part of the women of the household and this was why the role of the governess was viewed as being appropriate for women to partake in.

The great majority of working women in Victorian England belonged to the lower or labouring classes, as opposed to those of the middle classes. A satisfactory definition of the "middle classes" is difficult to come by, but one Victorian described them aptly as 'that part of the population which, on the whole, and mainly, has to earn its own living, and to earn it by headwork rather than by handwork. By devoting herself to the care and education of children, even for hire, a lady could fill the role for which nature had intended her; and by living at home and going out into other homes as a daily governess, or by working as a resident governess in a girls' boarding school or in her employers' household, she would still enjoy that sheltering abode deemed to be her proper sphere. Every woman was by nature a teacher (Holcombe, 12).

It was believed that along with maintaining a proper household, women and governesses of the time were responsible for educating the children and making sure the children were prepared to enter society and function as an adult. The governesses themselves were not always properly educated and usually received what was called "frivolous" education during this time.

Indifferently or frivolously educated, often empty-headed and limited in outlook, idle and dependent upon men for their livelihood and their status in society, middle-class women not unnaturally were considered a subordinate species altogether, while women of intelligence and ability were frustrated by the narrow, stultifying lives which were their lot (Holcombe, 5).

Shirley and Caroline in *Shirley* were two women that were frustrated with their positions in life. They spent a whole lot of time worrying about Robert Moore throughout the novel and never really had anything else to occupy their time. Bronte showed this situation time and time again within the novel; she also had the characters address this issue.

‘Caroline,’ demanded Miss Keeldar abruptly, ‘don’t you wish you had a profession- a trade?’ ‘I wish it fifty times a day. As it is, I often wonder what I came into the world for. I long to have something absorbing and compulsory to fill my head and hands, and to occupy my thoughts.’ ‘Can labour alone make a human being happy?’ ‘No but it can give varieties of pain and prevent us from breaking our hearts with a single tyrant master-torture. Besides, successful labour has its recompense; a vacant, weary, lonely, hopeless life has none’. ‘But labour and learned professions, they say, make women masculine, coarse, unwomanly’. ‘But what does it signify whether unmarried and never-to- be married women are unattractive and inelegant, or not? - provided only they are decent, docorous, and neat, it is enough’ (Bronte 216-217).

The idea of working and finding a job was something that they thought would make their lives more meaningful and allow them to serve a purpose (instead of worrying about the men and

their duties all the time, they would have something of their own to concentrate on). However, by the end of the passage, these women were also facing the fact that society made it very difficult for them to have a working role because of society's view on working women. This position of governess also showed the women the type of roles the family members would play. Governessing was a major step above the mill work that the women of lower classes were subjected to, but it still was not a glamorous job by any account. These women were often mistreated and even misused even though they filled such major roles within the household as shown in Bronte's *Shirley*.

Within *Shirley*, Bronte gave the governesses of the house several important roles within the text. The one that was most interesting was the fact that Shirley's governess ended up being her real mother.

'Then, if you love me,' said she, speaking quickly, with an altered voice: 'if you feel as if - to use your own words - you could 'grow to my heart,' it will be neither shock nor pain for you to know that that heart is the source whence yours was filled: that from my veins issued the tide which flows in yours; that you are mine - my daughter - my own child' (Bronte, 403).

Bronte forced readers to recognize the governesses within the novel as just more than the help to the main characters. This action shifted a governess into a more dominating role because she had birthed someone that is now part of different class and is living a decent daily life even if idle. These women that worked so diligently also had lives and a past that often the people in charge did not take the time to figure anything out about. "Service can be seen as a bridging occupation, bringing working- and middle-class women together" (Johnson, 113). This situation

showed the two family members reconnecting over a moment where the governess was simply doing her job and caring for the women for whom she was working. Ms. Pryor was of course providing the labor, but being an idle woman was Shirley's occupation and this moment where their occupations met is where the truth in the novel occurs. Without both women being in the roles that they were, this exchange would not have been able to occur (especially across different class systems).

There were many other situations that the governesses faced dealt with in the novel. Bronte kept the idea of governessing as a profession that women was acceptable for women to do, but did not hide all the hard parts of the position. But, however 'respectable' and 'natural' her occupation, the governess's lot was not a happy one. For those living at home or in girls' schools the life was hard and lonely, unprepared as they were for the work and cut off, by the necessity of working, from their former social circle. As for governesses living with their charges' families, they were usually expected to act as nurses and maids as well as teachers for the children, and to make themselves generally useful whenever needed. They were often excluded from the family circle as being little better than servants, and were in turn despised by the servants themselves (Holcombe 13-14).

The idea of the governess filling many roles was one that was present throughout the novel as well. By the end of the novel Ms. Pryor had moved from governess, to nurse, and to a mother situation. The blurring of roles was a common occurrence for the governesses. They were forced to fulfill several positions within the household and were not given a choice in the matter. They were not treated with any type of respect from any one (not even the servants, who were

technically, part of a lower class). Bronte showed the typical experience of a governess and what they had to go through within a household.

'The ladies too made it plain that they thought me 'a bore.' The servants, it was signified, 'detested me'; why, I could never clearly comprehend. My pupils, I was told, 'however much they might love me, and how deep so ever the interest I might take in them, could not be my friends.' It was intimated that I must 'live alone, and never transgress the invisible but rigid line which established the difference between me and my employers.' My life in this house was sedentary, solitary, constrained, joyless, toilsome. The dreadful crushing of the animal spirits, the ever-prevailing sense of friendlessness and homelessness consequent on this state of things, began ere long to produce mortal effects on my constitution - I sickened. The lady of the house told me coolly I was the victim of 'wounded vanity.' She hinted, that if I did not make an effort to quell my 'ungodly discontent,' to cease 'murmuring against God's appointment,' and to cultivate the profound humility befitting my station, my mind would very likely 'go to pieces' on the rock that wrecked most of my sisterhood - morbid self-esteem; and that I should die an inmate of a lunatic asylum (Bronte, 355).

Bronte showed Mrs. Pryor's situation as a governess as something that was not desirable for those people that could avoid it. Mrs. Pryor was faced with the fact that she was not a part of the family that she was hired into because she was hired help, but also was not accepted by the other help because she was not on the same level as them and they considered her an outsider (because she would not understand what it was like to be a part of their class). Mrs. Pryor then

had to deal with the children within the household. These kids knew that they were dealing with someone that was hired into the household to take care of and educate them. They often made the governess's job one that was impossible to carry through and even would make lessons impossible. A governess did not have the luxury of going to the parents of the household and complaining because they would think she was inadequate and remove her from the position (and possibly even prevent her from gaining further employment by spreading the word about what happened within their household). Mrs. Pryor and other governesses during this time were forced to deal with the children and basically hope that they would be decent. In the quote from Bronte it states that 'the children of the house would not be Mrs. Pryor's friends', Bronte is saying that the children were still technically a boss within the household in relation to the governess because they were a part of the ruling family. So even if the governess could find some type of relationship with the children she would still need to keep her distance because at the end of the day she is the help.

On top of all the stresses of the job, finding a husband and trying to find a balance within their own lives and work, many of the women were living within the household into which they were hired. This gave the governesses no freedom from their work and the family they worked for. This is how they found themselves adding extra duties to their daily routines besides educating because they never left the house that they worked in. These women were often kept isolated from their own friends and family because it was a burden on the family to have visitors over or to even have her leave for a little while to visit with her acquaintances. "The isolation of the governess was unnecessarily increased by the unwillingness of many employers to allow her visitors. When they were allowed they were often rudely treated" (Neff, 168). This showed the type of treatment that not only the governesses themselves faced, but also their guests. They

would find ways to make them uncomfortable so that instead of having to say that they couldn't have visitors, they would just make them feel unwelcome and hope they got the point and not come back and disturb their lives.

Women were at a great disadvantage being a governess during this time, but it was a lot better physically on their bodies than mill work or prostitution. However, they were only in these more decent working conditions because they were needed to marry and have children and continue the Victorian traditions. A major determining factor in allowing the women to hold this position was the "education" they would receive on households and children while in the position. The women were really given no option within this time. If they worked a job that was unacceptable in society's eyes they were considered "fallen women", if they held a governess position it was so society could control them and train them to be married women with a house to care after, and if the women decided that neither of these roles suited them and they were idle, they were considered useless to the men and someone who could not control a household. Women were therefore left without an option of being satisfied and happy. Women that attempted to bridge the different classes were often not successful and put into difficult situations like the governesses during this era.

## Chapter Four

### Sybil: A Symbol of Working Class Women?

Unlike the women from *Shirley*, Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845) had an occupation and was very much active within her community. Sybil was needed within the society by both men and women. Benjamin Disraeli examined several different viewpoints of a community within the novel *Sybil or The Two Nations* (1845). Disraeli was focused on the Condition of England Question and was involved with the Chartist movement. He used his writing as a way to focus on the classes within the nation and the issues within them. "Two Nations implies that there is a great gap between the aristocracy and the working-class" (Gallagher, 203). Disraeli focused on the working-classes and used Sybil as the connection between them. Sybil was a character that was living in a convent, but was also found out and about within the community helping people in their time of need (illness). She was often sought after by many men, but showed very little interest in them once she found out more intimate details about them (class, thoughts on Five Points etc.). "Three factory girls are minor characters in *Sybil*, but the eponymous heroine is constructed as a kind of anti-factory girl. Although she refers to herself as 'a daughter of the people', she has no experience of actual working-class life" (Johnson, 28). She was a woman who often found herself in trouble because she was a female that had not entered a day in working class life. Having Sybil identified as "daughter of the people" and having no working experience led her into many rough situations and forced the idea that this person that was representing them actually was not one of them.

Sybil was in a situation where she often found herself straddling two different lives. She was stuck within the political life her father led and the life of the convent which did not allow



her the access to the daily dangers a woman often faced in the working- class life. “‘We live almost in the Precinct-- in an old house, with some kind old people, the brother of one of the nuns of Mowbray. The nearest way to it is straight along this street, but that is too bustling for me, I have discovered,’ she added with a smile, ‘a more tranquil path’” (Disraeli, 201). She therefore often found herself in need of assistance which gave men an opening to harass and insult her and which later in the novel almost led to her being raped.

One ruffian had grasped the arm of Sybil; another had clenched her garments, when an officer, covered with dust and gore, sabre in hand, jumped from the terrace, and hurried to the rescue. He cut down one man, thrust away another, and placing his left arm round Sybil, he defended her with his sword, while Harold, now become furious, flew from man to man, and protected her on the other side (Disraeli, 355-356).

Sybil in this situation was hiding from the mob that was attacking the castle and thought perhaps she would be safe from the battle where she was hiding. However, Sybil misjudged the situation and left herself open to attack from the rowdy men and therefore was in need of male assistance which came in the form of Egremont. Egremont had often tried to become involved with Sybil with no success and he was also close with her father Gerard. “But such a description of harassment is so generalized and unlocatable that the result is not a questioning of the systemic forces that create it. Instead, the novel’s resolution to the problem is that pure women such as Sybil need protection a Harold to accompany them wherever they go. Sybil will never be able to ‘walk alone’; she will always be accompanied, by either a harasser or a protector” (Johnson, 59). Sybil’s lack of experience within every day working-class life led her to situations that with a little more “life experience” would have been avoided, but again the blame was being placed on

the fact that she was pure and unaware of the working situation that has led the large group of people to this type of exposure and lifestyle. “By making her seem unnaturally helpless and ignorant about society, the author thus emphasizes the incompatibility between Sybil and the actual social world” (Gallagher, 214). The text made Sybil the one that needed to change because she was the only one that was having these types of issues because the rest of the women of this class were already degraded to this level. “Sybil thus represents a kind of value that is not socially produced, that is, indeed, produced by its removal from the social process of exchange” (Gallagher, 215). Instead of trying to purify the rest of the people and get them back to good moral ground, it was Sybil that was viewed as needing to change to protect herself and not be dependent on a man for the protection. “Only the angelic, convent-bred Sybil is harassed, not the factory girls, who are represented as freely roaming the streets and drinking in a pub. The implication is that only the properly cloistered respectable woman can be harassed; factory girls, who work in mixed- sex settings, are immune” (Johnson, 58). Within the novel Sybil was the only female that was being harassed. The other females that were of the working class did not face the harassment within the scenes because Sybil was viewed as a more weak and vulnerable creature because she was protected from it most of her life. “A great prison. How strange it is that, in a vast city like this, one can scarcely walk alone” (Disraeli, 285). This quote from the text again showed the fact that it is a society issue and that instead of focusing the attention on the fragile female, the focus should be on the flaws that societal had now taken on.

Besides the harassment of Sybil in the text, she was also faced with the fact that she was referred to as the “daughter of the people”. This was an interesting title for her to have due to her lack of knowledge and experience within the sphere of their daily lives. Although she helped them in their times of need and provided healthcare and healing to them, she was not one of them

because of her job status. She did not work in the mills like them and was not forced to support her whole family like Harriet, a hand-loomer's daughter, was. Harriet did not have the most pleasant life. She actually fled her house and left her family to fend for themselves. Harriet said in one passage, "I must say there is nothing I grudge for except good tea. Now I keep house, I mean to always drink the best" (Disraeli, 78). This was what Harriet would rather be involved with instead of taking care of her parents and siblings. Sybil would never be faced with such a choice because in the convent that option is not there and her father does not need her labor to survive. So in direct contrast with Harriet, Sybil was not in that type of class situation. "A women's experience of working-class life is represented here both as sexual and as a form of degradation; Sybil's convent background is the sign of her complete separation from its pollution. Thus the novel arrives at the contradiction that the 'Woman' who represents 'the people' is a woman who has no working-class experiences" (Johnson, 87). This is a problem for women because the one that was a symbol for them in the novel is not one of them and therefore could not properly represent the population of women that she was supposed to represent. Sybil also was not aware of her sexuality as a woman of the convent. The idea of sexuality is one that is directly linked with the working-class female and this is something that Sybil did not have any knowledge of. She did not use the language and obscenities that many working-class women did at this time. The idea of motherhood was found in parts of the novel that were focusing on the behavior of the working class women as well, "of both sexes, though neither their raiment nor their language indicates the difference; all are clad in male attire; and oaths that men might shudder at, issue from lips born to breathe words of sweetness. Yet these are to be, some are, the mothers of England" (Disraeli, 161). Sybil did not fit into this type of lifestyle and could not even imagine what this type of life would be like because of the sheltered life of the convent.

The second issue that this brought up within the text is the fear that these women would not become proper Victorian mothers and would not be able to fit into the sphere in which they belonged. Sybil again in this situation would be exempt because as a nun she would not be expected to marry like these working-class women because she would be focusing on God and his work. Her father Gerard had thoughts on his daughter getting married as well:

‘I would not have her take the veil rashly, but if I lose her, it may be for the best. For the married life of a woman of our class, in the present condition of our country, is a lease of woe’, he added, shaking his head, ‘slaves, and the slaves of slaves! Even a woman’s spirit cannot stand against it; and it can bear up against more than we can master.’ ‘Your daughter is not made for the common cares of life,’ said Egremont (Disraeli, 117).

This showed that both Egremont and Sybil’s father understand what marriage means to a female during this time. Sybil would not be happy within this sphere of life because it was common knowledge that marriage for many women was not a happy thing in which to be involved. The final idea that Sybil was “not made for the common cares of life” showed that she was something that was above this standard of living and that she was even possibly too gentle or not strong enough to withstand this lifestyle. The lifestyle would have meant for her to hold a household, children and possibly even a job to help with some type of income. This was something that Sybil did not seem interested in and something that she could not endure.

The struggle between working women and what was expected of Victorian women is the issue that this represents. The idea of the household and women that work were not blending

well together and this made many people uncomfortable. The issue of Sybil as their symbol is exactly that issue.

Sybil emerges specifically to counter images of savage, degraded working-class women. Descriptions of women in the 1840's working-class women focused on their sexuality and their supposed lack of maternal feeling and housekeeping skills are constantly paired with invocation of 'Woman' as the fountain of life and the measure of civilization (Johnson, 75).

She does not focus on this sexuality because she is a nun and she would live in a convent and would not keep a household. Sybil could not be both a nun and a true representation of this class of people. Sybil and the other women in this role played a large part in the political issues that were occurring within the text. Although women were not involved in them as far as voting the fact that there was a Queen in charge of England at the time gave these women something to talk about and work towards other than the idleness found in the lives of the women in *Shirley*. The women found within this book really did hold some political power among themselves and their men. Sybil in this situation fell short again because of her lack of knowledge of "street life" (and of course what the societal norms are for the middle-working class women). This was a situation that many women faced leaving their household duties to enter the workforce. Sybil was on a mission to attempt to save her father from the cops that were coming to interrupt their secretive meeting about uprising. On her way however, she encountered several issues that were made worse by the fact that she needed to depend on the men around her to get her to where she needed to be. "The failure of her rescue mission matches her larger failure to face down harassment and define a field of action for her own" (Johnson, 63). She relied on a man who led her the wrong way and wasted precious time when she really needed every second that she had.

She was told to look for a print shop so she inquired with a man and one finally stepped forward to “help” her.

‘No. 22: a printing- office,’ said Sybil; for the street she had entered was so dark she despaired of finding her way, and ventured to trust so far a guide who was not policeman. ‘The very house I am going to,’ said the stranger: ‘I am a printer,’ And they walked on some way, until they at length stopped before a glass illuminated door covered with a red curtain. Before it was a group of several men and women brawling, but who did not notice Sybil and her companion. ‘Here we are,’ said the man; and he pushed the door open, inviting Sybil to enter. She hesitated; it did not agree with the description that had been given her by the coffee- house keeper, but she had seen so much since, and felt so much, and gone through so much, that she had not at the moment that clear command of her memory for which she was otherwise remarkable; but while she faltered, an inner door was violently thrown open, and Sybil moving aside, two girls, still beautiful in spite of gin and paint, stepped into the street. ‘This cannot be the house,’ exclaimed Sybil, starting back, overwhelmed with shame and terror (Disraeli, 365).

This scene from *Sybil* showed the fact that she needed to rely on a man and had placed her trust in someone that could not be trusted. She was led in the wrong direction and into a house with prostitutes and was completely out of her comfort zone. She was unfamiliar with the places she was entering and the people that were around her during this time. She took a complete stranger’s word for the truth even after she recognized that he was not a police officer. She put herself into a dangerous situation while trying to do something good for her father and protect him, however Sybil was struggling to even protect herself. After this situation occurred she was

guided to the correct location by an Irish man who helped her because she was a lady of the church. When she finally reached her location with this gentleman's help she was unable to help her father (even though she made it in time to do so). Sybil passed out before she was able to tell her father what was going to happen to him and the other people at the meeting. They ended up being arrested (Sybil included) and removed from the scene and placed in prison.

Sybil showed that she would try to protect her father and the people he was politically involved with, however her lack of working-class situations and life did not allow her to make it without fainting from the experiences she faced along the way. This failure of her mission if she was indeed the "daughter of the people" showed that they would not win either. These working class people throughout the novel were having their wages cut and even were being paid in the materials that their factories were making. Sybil being the symbol for this party was weak and unable to complete her mission just like the people when they would often strike against their employers. Sybil herself was a pure woman that was placed into a community and situation that was not fit for someone of her nature.

Like all the women and situations within the novels, the women during this time really did not stand a chance in advancing their lives or having an option of a healthy one. Victorian women were faced with too many obstacles both from society as a whole and during their daily lives. Women were set up to be forced into having a household and raising children. In Sybil's case she was left without her father when he ended up being killed and at the end of novel still needed protection from someone of opposite sex who could easily turn his back. Sybil showed throughout the novel the impact that society had upon her (and other women). Sybil showed that even when women were working and creating a path from themselves in life, men and society could find a way to ruin that for women.

Within the texts *Helen Fleetwood*, *Shirley*, *Goblin Market*, *North and South*, and *Sybil* the authors show what struggles the working women of this era encountered. These women were forced to live within a society that did not accept their way of life (as a worker). The working women were also in this position because of the way society had determined life would be for women overall. They were forced into their working roles and had no other option.

Women workers of the factories, idle women, prostitutes, governesses, and even mothers all were forced into these positions by what options were available to them. The women during the Victorian Era (if even they had different titles) were all working because their income and wages would not suffice to support a family. This was not limited to just unmarried women, when the men did not have a sufficient income the women had to work in order to help support their families. This extra effort and help from the women did not have a large impact on the household income however, because they were paid less than the men were because they were female workers.

This literature shows women during the Victorian Era were unable to make any true advancement because they were already in their pre-determined class at birth. The women that were in a position where they had to work to survive were put into an even worse situation because the other women of their class would shun them and make their lives very difficult on a daily basis. Women workers during this time were unable to advance their positions and were given no opportunity within society to even be accepted. Women during this time were in a stagnant position and were unable to really find any hope or success when they were forced into these life- long roles.



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